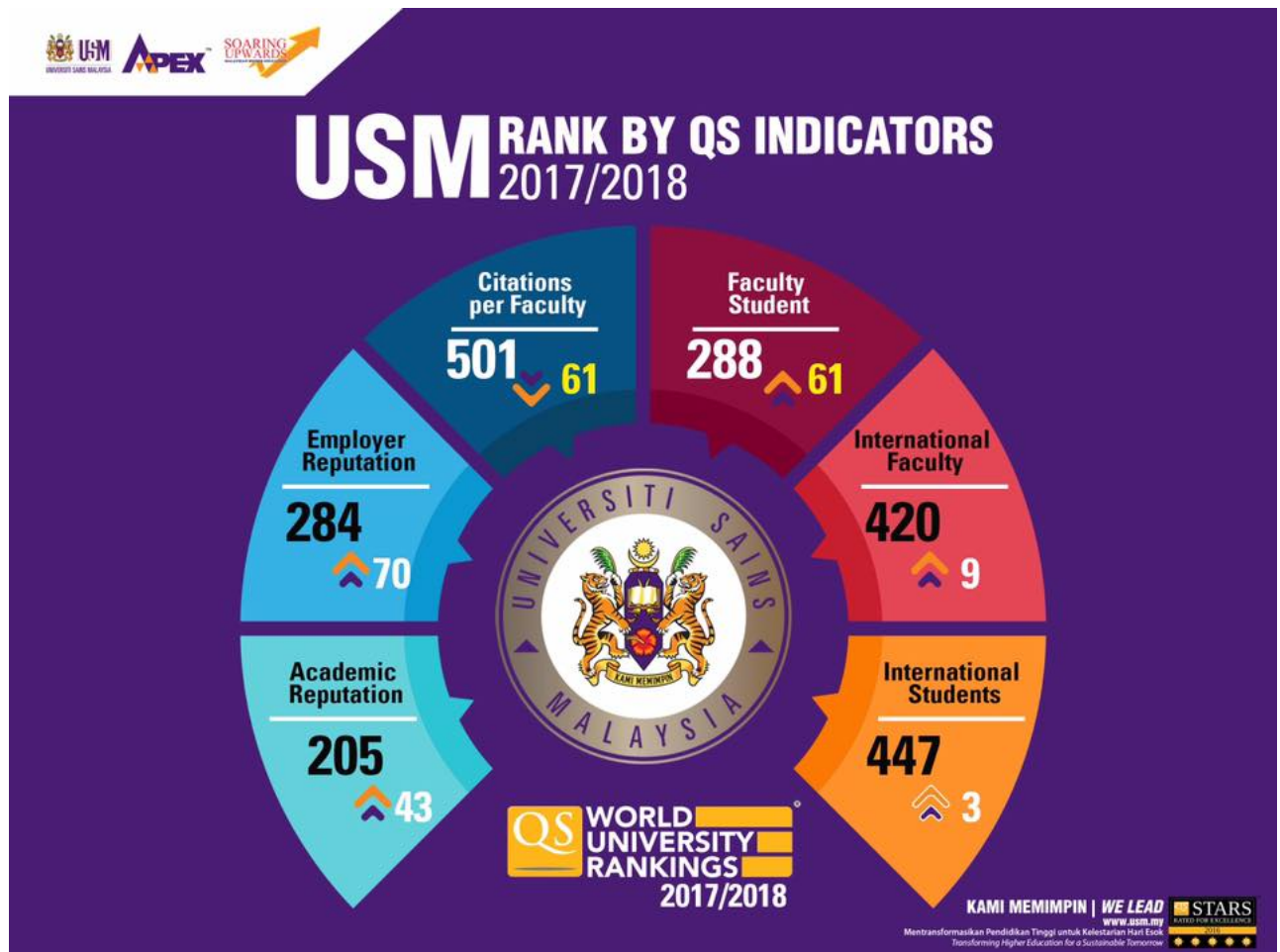


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It's the ranking season for universities yet again. This is the moment when announcements would be made on which university gets the annually coveted position or being in the top 10 or what is known as the top 1% in the world.

Generally, rankings are conducted based on various factors and would be one determiner of the university's reputation in the world, as well as in providing some sort of awareness and shaping the perception of the general public. Most rankings would assess research outputs from the institutions, within a specific country or the world over.

At present, there are no fewer than 22 different ranking exercises done by various independent bodies, governments and academics, as listed by Wikipedia. Although there are no commonly shared methodologies in conducting such rankings, they have been generally accepted by the public as fair

means to evaluate such institutions.

The challenge for higher education institutions in Malaysia is to ensure that they stand tall among their more renowned peers throughout the world. What originally was a mission statement from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has now become a perennial challenge for the institutions to continue 'soaring upwards', in rankings and also in reputation. They need to not only stand tall, but also stand out from the crowd, namely the 26,000 universities around the world.

This is where it pays to be smart. By vying for the respective positions, the institutions to a certain extent would need to initiate changes within themselves. Nowadays, change is inevitable. But change is also a risk. Being resilient and agile would be one way for such institutions to continue being at the top among its peers, while attracting the best talents in teaching, research and academics into their fold.

CONGRATULATIONS

Rank #264

Rank #330
Year 2016/2017

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2017/2018

- BEST Overall Achievement in 5 years**
- USM Moved Up 66 Places**
- TOP 1% of Universities in the WORLD**
- Ranked #205 Academic Reputation**

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Another viewpoint to consider would be whether our local institutions would go the way of becoming a 'jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none' educational entity in order to fulfil the various indicators or criteria being assessed. Do they want to be known as an institution that caters to all types of 'customers' or do they prefer to be more 'specialised' and focusing on niche areas. For some, being unique would define and determine your place to lead. It sets you apart from the rest, to continue being the captain of the crowd, and to champion the national academic agenda.

As for USM, being at #205 for Academic Reputation is a blessing as well as a reminder to spur onwards towards greater heights. Achievements in other indicators too are to be applauded. However, it is not enough to just be in the top 1.0% and resting on one's laurels. In order to be continually

relevant, referred and respected, the university (in fact, all universities) need to undergo the necessary (and disruptive) changes and adaptations, as well as to co-learn with its peers.

Dealing with the Fourth Industrial Revolution would be one priority in order for universities to remain relevant. Creativity and innovation need to be the catch phrase, in fields already familiar and newly-explored. Knowledge should be explored and expanded and shared in a holistic and multidisciplinary approach. Growth would be exponential in the future and universities should strategise and implement in the same manner. Business unusual should be the order of the day. Then, the local universities can look forward to 'engineering' Nobel Prize winners in the future, for the future.

Whatever pathway that is chosen, as we rejoice in our Research Universities (RUs) being in the Top 300 and Top 1.0% universities in the world, we should be warming and gearing up for the future, and to sprint ahead in anticipation of the next ranking exercise. We need to further hone our skills and capabilities in fulfilling the indicators earlier assessed, in our plans to establish the country as a global education hub. There is no room for stumbles or miscalculations as we aspire to soar upwards even higher. When we want to join the big leagues (and Ivy Leaguers), failure is surely not an option.



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